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ABSTRACT

The President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies made over 130 recommendations aimed at strengthening international education. This report concerns itself with those recommendations that are generally or specifically related to community colleges. It presents excerpts from the Commission's report that deal with: (1) expanding course offerings and educational opportunities in college and university programs: (2) the role of the community college in promoting citizen education in international affairs: (3) improving foreign language competence and fostering international consciousness at all educational levels: (4) making international studies courses and exchange programs available at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and making efforts to increase interest and enrollment in these programs (5) centralizing international studies at a high level in the administrative structure of a college or university: (6) advancing international research and training through academic and scholarly exchanges: and (7) the importance of international education to the foreign trade effort of the United States. (JP)

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AN ANALYSIS

THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES: REPORTS ITS RECOMMENDATIONS

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THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES: REPORTS ITS RECOMMENDATIONS

The President's Commission presented its report to President Carter in November following a year of hearings, research, study, and consultation. The 25-member commission consisted of leaders in education, government, language and area studies, and business and labor. One of the commissioners was Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., president of the AACJC; its chairman was James A. Perkins.

The Commission's 156-page report, "Strength Through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S. Capability," is available for $4.75 from the Superintendent of Documents (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402; Stock Number 017-080-02054-3). Also available from the same source is an accompanying 312-page volume, "Background Papers and Studies," which consists of writings requested or encouraged by the Commission.

The Report includes over 130 recommendations for which the cost of implementation to the federal government would be about $178 million more than the $67 million appropriated in fiscal 1979 for foreign language and international studies at all levels. One of the Commission's final recommendations was that a non-governmental group, the National Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies, be established with private financing to monitor and report on this field and encourage its support by government and the private sector.

To understand the Commission's overall rationale and recommendations, it is necessary to be familiar with its complete report. For our purposes here, we have excerpted only those parts generally and specifically related to community and junior colleges. Some generalizations have also been included to place particular recommendations within context and to represent the Commission's viewpoints:

PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSION

III. College and University Programs: Training and Research

A. Undergraduates should be given greater insight into foreign societies and international issues. To this end the Commission recommends: 2-3 required courses in international studies for all Bachelor's Candidates (apart from the required language study mentioned earlier), strengthened undergraduate offerings in international studies; a "domestic junior year" at major international studies centers for students at institutions with limited resources in this field; the integration of international or comparative perspectives in the teaching of most undergraduate subjects; expanded opportunities for faculty to acquire or strengthen their foreign language and international skills; increased faculty and student exchanges, and an expanded institutional commitment to undergraduate international studies.

B. As part of its support for international studies the Department of Education should fund 200 undergraduate international studies programs (ISPs) at an average of $40,000 each annually for a total of $8 million per year, for one to three years depending on the scope of individual programs. The purpose should be to encourage institutions to make a lasting commitment to undergraduate international studies. (pp. 16-17)

V. Citizen Education in International Affairs

B. Given the commitment of community colleges to citizen education, they should receive special attention in expanded international education efforts to reach all citizens. (p. 23)

CHAPTER I--Improving Foreign Language Competence at All Levels: No Longer Foreign, No Longer Alien

The Commission views as a priority concern the failure of schools and colleges to teach languages so that students can communicate in them. The inability of most Americans to speak or understand any language except English and to comprehend other cultures handicaps the U.S. seriously in the international arena. Paralleling our professional language need, foreign language instruction at any level should be a humanistic pursuit intended to sensitize students to other cultures, to the relativity of values, to appreciation of similarities among peoples and respect for the differences among them. It is axiomatic -- and the first step to international consciousness -- that once another language is mastered it is no longer foreign, once another culture is understood it is nc longer alien. (pp. 28-29)

CHAPTER III--College and University Programs: The Needs in Undergraduate and Advanced Studies

I. Recommendations for International Studies at the Undergraduate Level

The enormous diversity of our higher education system -- public and private sponsorship, community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and great "multiversities" -- and the vast differences in staff, facilities and resources involved rule out a simple and uniform prescription for strengthening international studies at the undergraduate level. It is possible, however, to set forth basic goals for undergraduate education in the international field and to recommend a variety of steps to help realize them. The following specific recommendations should significantly increase the number of college graduates broadly sophisticated on our international environment:

A. Colleges and universities in general should strengthen and improve the structure, quality, coverage and utility of their undergraduate offerings in the field of international studies, and should relate these offerings more directly to vocational as well as cultural and intellectual goals.

B. Colleges should require at least two or three courses in international studies of all Bachelor's degree candidates.

C. A "Domestic" junior year program should be established for students wishing to concentrate in international studies but enrolled in institutions with limited resources in this field. Inter-institutional agreements should allow these students to spend their junior year at institutions with major international studies centers. This period should be supplemented by intensive summer study in the months before and after the junior year.

D. With the possible exception of some so-called pure sciences, international or comparative perspectives should be part of the teaching of most subjects. To this end colleges and universities should encourage their faculty members to use sabbaticals and other professional growth opportunities to strengthen their international skills and experience.

E. Colleges and universities should offer both area studies (the study of foreign societies and cultures) and issues studies (the study of international relations and the principal issues and problems in U.S. relations with other countries), and should better integrate the two categories.

F. In general, colleges and universities should help and encourage their faculties to acquire, improve, and maintain international knowledge, skills and experiences that will enable them to teach more effectively in the international field. (pp. 71-73)

(Same Chapter)

Undergraduate institutions of all kinds normally attract relatively few students to international studies courses. In part this is because of the poor quality of initial courses in many institutions and in part because of the general education in college curricula. Another factor is the widespread failure to recognize the national, vocational, or personal advantages that flow from more exposure to international studies. Contributing to this situation is the fact that few faculty members in disciplines outside international studies as traditionally defined include international or comparative perspectives in their teaching. The Commission believes that these deficiencies must be remedied.

A special effort should be mounted in community colleges. They enroll close to half of all undergraduate but only a small fraction take courses in foreign languages or international studies. The community colleges have recently become far more active in international programs, especially in exchanges and technical assistance. To strengthen international studies in the curricula, however, community college faculty members need more in-service education opportunities especially because most were hired at a time when few colleges had the international studies commitment that many have since developed. (pp. 75-76)

(Same Chapter)

J. The Place of International Education in Colleges and Universities

The Commission recommends that American colleges and universities demonstrate and implement their commitment to international studies and programs by centralizing them at a high level in their institutional structure. Such an international studies office would have direct access to the central administration and sufficient staff and resources to have leverage throughout the institution. It is also important that this office be broadly inclusive, so that foreign languages and international studies, student and faculty exchanges, and foreign assistance projects and contracts are coordinated and mutually reenforcing rather than separate and competing. Crucial to all this is the leadership that the president of the college or university provides by encouraging and supporting international programs. (pp. 93-94)

CHAPTER IV--Advancing International Research and Teaching Through Academic and Scholarly Exchanges

B. Although the large numbers of foreign students and academic visitors coming to the United States outside organized exchange programs were not of primary concern to the Commission's inquiry, we note that their presence deserves more consistent and thoughtful attention than it now receives. These visitors represent an important opportunity for us, since they frequently rise to influential positions in their own countries. Moreover, although we recognize that the primary purpose of foreign students in the U.S. is to advance their professional goals, while here they could assist in encouraging international perspectives in academic and extracurricular programs on our campuses, as well as in our communities. (p. 111)

CHAPTER V--Toward an Informed Electorate: Citizen Education in International Affairs

Currently U.S. foreign policy issues need much wider public understanding if the government's positions are to receive broad public scrutiny and support. The urgency of issues confronting the United States increases the need for an educated electorate; we cannot wait for another generation to become educated about these issues. Moreover, the changes urgently needed in current educational systems and policies to strengthen foreign language and international studies -- whether at local, state or national levels -- also require the understanding and support of an informed citizenry.

International educational programs for adults are now carried out by national and community-based professional and voluntary associations, by community-based professional and voluntary associations, by community and four-year colleges and universities and, to some extent, by the public media. In all cases the programming tends to suffer from many of the same weaknesses: lack of continuity over time, combined with an uneven quality and quantity; failure to identify target audiences clearly and to collaborate with groups that have parallel interests; gaps in knowledge about suitable resources and about techniques of program delivery; weak organization or planning skills; and inadequate funding. Programming expertise and educational impact vary considerably from one part of the country, and even from one part of a state to another. (pp. 112-113)

(Same Chapter)

II. Community Colleges

Our more than 1,000 community colleges, which constitute a widely dispersed network committed to accessibility and community education, and whose students reflect the social, economic, ethnic and occupational diversity of American society, should have a central role in the Commission's charge to "recommend ways to extend the knowledge of other citizens to the broadest population base possible." The enrollment level in noncredit adult and continuing education courses at colleges and universities in 1977-78 was 10.2 million; of this number, 5.2 million were at the community colleges.

The Commission therefore recommends special attention to the community colleges in advancing citizen education through NDEA VI, Section 603 funding and support from other sources. It also urges that the community colleges themselves enlarge their international commitment and engage in the staff development necessary to strengthen their contribution to foreign language and international studies. (p. 116)

CHAPTER VI--Business and Labor Needs Abroad: Toward Greater Effectiveness and Sophistication

International trade involves one out of every eight of America's manufacturing jobs and one out of every three acres of America's farmland. American investment abroad is around $300 billion, and foreign investment in the U.S. is an estimated $245 billion. The 13 largest American banks now derive almost 50 per cent of their total earnings from overseas credits. Approximately 35,000 American business people live abroad, about 6,000 American companies have overseas operations, and 20,000 concerns export products or services to foreign markets. The estimate that each $1 billion of exported manufactured goods creates at least 30,000 jobs in the U.S. provides yet more evidence of our growing economic interdependence with the rest of the world.

International trade has become more important to our economic well-being than ever before, but our trade performance has deteriorated ominously: America's trade deficit amount to $28.5 billion in 1978. This deficit, due in part to our costly petroleum imports, must be reduced if we are to protect our currency and safeguard the American economy. Many American companies now expect that more of their growth in the next decade will come from foreign markets than from domestic operations, but serious obstacles stand in the way. While some involve such factors as low rates of productivity growth and domestic inflation, it is the Commission's view that one serious barrier to American business is its lack of foreign language and area expertise.

This lack of expertise applies far more to small and middle-level business concerns than to the few large companies with major operationsabroad, which often have impressive resources in these fields. Moreover, as the Rand study for the Commission reported, there is a heavy reliance on foreign nationals for language and area skills, except in such fields as journalism, management consulting, law, and to some extent banking, which involve direct contact with foreign clients.

If the U.S. is to export more and compete more effectively in international trade, it is the many small and middle-level firms that must be involved and therefore assisted in obtaining the international expertise required. But American business people at these levels are often at a disadvantage when functioning internationally. They rarely speak foreign languages and have little experience or cultural skills in negotiating with foreign enterprises or governments. (pp. 125-126)

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